



February 2-3, 2019
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Instagram Jesus: Discipleship

Mark 1:14-20

If you're joining us for the first time, we've launched a series called "Instagram Jesus." It's based on the gospel of Mark...but the voice behind this gospel is actually St. Peter. As you know, Peter could be impulsive and hasty at times... so it's no surprise that HIS gospel has many of those qualities. It moves at fast pace; it often ignores details other gospels include. But if you want to get right to the point, Mark's your gospel. In fact, his favorite word is ...remember? "Immediately!" Every time you read it, just smile...and imagine Peter in the background, rattling off his stories as fast as he can!

Today, on the heels of his baptism and temptation, Jesus launches his ministry:

Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men." And immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him.

Next fall I will lead another group to Israel. But on my first trip there 35 years ago, I was overwhelmed! Masada was breath-taking. Jerusalem was overload. The temple steps upon which Jesus walked; the Pool of Bethesda, the Garden of Gethsemane with 2000-year-old olive trees. It was spectacular!

But my favorite moment took place 80 miles north on the Sea of Galilee. I was jet-lagged and awoke early the first morning. I walked down to the lake to catch the sunrise and watched as two fishermen set out in their boat. They cast their nets and began making noise to drive the fish into the trap. I just stood and soaked it all in. Jerusalem has been conquered and rebuilt so many times over the centuries that today, some of the streets are 80 feet higher than the ones Christ walked on. But when I stood on the shore that Jesus stood on...watched those fishermen at work, I was transported back in time.

his is how Jesus launched his ministry. Not with teaching or miracles or the casting out of evil spirits. The first thing Jesus did to begin his ministry was invite four fishermen to join him. Jesus is about to call his first disciples. And they would change the world.

So I want you to ask yourself this question: Am I a disciple of Jesus? If so, what does that mean? Because Jesus defines discipleship in this story. In your worship folder is an insert. Pull it out and use this slip of paper to do a spiritual self-assessment. Let's see how YOUR definition of discipleship compares to that of Jesus.

Ready? Here are the three defining points of Christian discipleship from Mark 1:17:

1. Follow me ...2. And I will make you become...3. Fishers of Men.

My teen years were rough. I was a year younger than everyone in my grade which meant I was a year behind in growth, in maturity...in everything that makes the teen years a little less miserable. I needed a shot of self-confidence and my parents decided Karate would provide that for me. So I joined a class taught by Morris Mack. I admired him. He was big, strong, confident...and he gave ME confidence. He became my "sensei"...a Japanese word for master. I bowed toward him as a sign of respect. And of course, I did what he told me to do because I wanted to earn my black belt. Which I did when I turned 16. Of course, Sensei Mack was just a man with strengths AND weaknesses, something I learned the older I got. But for 8 years, until I moved away, I followed him and I learned a lot of things that shaped me into the person I am today.

These four fishermen were about to become disciples to the greatest master ever. And it began with the words, "Follow me..." There was nothing unusual about rabbis having disciples. Jewish culture was steeped in learning and tradition and one of the best ways to be educated was to attach yourself to a rabbi. But here's the thing: rabbis NEVER did the calling. It was the would-be disciple who sought out the rabbi.

But not Jesus. His first act of ministry was to call four men to himself. This is important to understand. Our relationship with Jesus ALWAYS begins with his call to us. It was God's idea to save us. God's idea to send his son. God's idea to invite you into relationship. If you are a disciple of Jesus...it is ONLY because you heard the Holy Spirit say, "Whatever you are doing with your life, I have a better idea. I love you... I value you... I want a relationship with you and so, I'm asking...will you follow me?"

So...let's pause there. Are you a follower of Jesus? It might seem like a basic question, but wait. Many claim to be followers of Jesus...aren't. They are fans; not followers. It is true today; it was true in the time of Christ. Thousands of people were attracted to the power, teaching, and charisma of Jesus. The more his fame spread, the more people wanted a piece of him. At one point, the streets were so packed that the only way a group of guys could reach Jesus was to hack a hole in the roof of the house in which he taught.

Jesus had tons of fans. He still does. People who find him fascinating...inspiring. People who want or need something from him. People who obey him...as long as it is convenient. As you watch the gospels unfold, things start out with a bang. Everybody is on the Jesus bandwagon. And then...he starts to get up in their business. His teaching starts to sting. He calls them to sacrifice. He says something that irritates them...and the crowds start withering away. At one point, as he watches his fans depart, Jesus asks his disciples, "What about you. Will you leave me, too?"

Jesus didn't say, "Cheer for me. Be intrigued with me. Brag that you've met me. Facebook friend me." He said, "Follow me. Trust me. Believe I have your best interests at heart...and that I know more than you do. Believe it even when it is unpopular or hard." One of the tests of being a follower of Jesus is answering this question: Is Jesus first in my life? Is he more important to me

than anything? More important than my wealth, my career, my friends, my hobbies, my family...my marriage?"

When Jesus called the four...IMMEDIATELY... they walked away from everything that mattered to them. Their boats and nets...even family and friends! As it turned out, Jesus gave all that back to them...and more. But in that moment, they had to decide whether or not they trusted Jesus enough to leave behind that which was most precious.

I'm not saying this is easy. I love my wife. I love my kids. I love my job. I like my IRA! But to follow Jesus means I'm willing to say, "As much as I love all those things...following Jesus... must be the priority of my life." If you aren't willing to entrust everything to Jesus...then you are probably a fan...but not a follower.

Now before you feel too overwhelmed, let's turn to point 2: Follow me... "...and I will make you become." This is about life transformation. And there are two important things. First, who does the transforming? Jesus. "Follow me and I will make you..." Being a disciple is not about ME making myself better or behaving. It is about Jesus making me into what he wants me to be. Which is such a relief! Being a Christian is not about ME getting my act together. It is about Jesus getting my act together!

And notice: it is a process! You probably learned this verse differently: "Follow me and I will make you..." ...which makes it sound magical. Zap! Presto change-o. You are suddenly a different person. But Jesus REALLY said, "I will make you become..." In other words, "I'm going to take you where you are right now...and if you trust me, bit by bit...step by step... I'm going to shape you into the person you were created to be."

If you are a true disciple of Jesus, he is changing you. I was talking to a long-time professional friend who recently made the brave decision to visit Celebrate Recovery. As he walked in, he was looking over his shoulder, wondering and worrying about who might see him. But he discovered what a life-giving place it was. He told me, "I have never felt so un-judged; never been in a place where my brothers are so fearlessly honest. It is liberating." He told me he still looks around when he walks in each week to see if someone will notice him... now, it's because he is proud to be seen there! God is using CR to transform him!

A true disciple of Jesus is being transformed by Jesus. Bit by bit. You may not notice it at the time, but as you look back...or as others look at you...they will say, "Wow...you are different! You are (fill in the blank here)... Gentler, kinder, more generous, more courageous, more faithful...than you used to be." Can you say that of yourself? As you compare the spiritual picture of your... your today-you... to your one-year-ago-you...or your five-year-ago- you... can you see a difference? If yes, great news! The Spirit of Jesus is at work. But if no change... that ought to get your attention.

Now part three: Follow me and I will make you become "...fishers of men."

The mission of Jesus is to seek and to save the lost. He illustrated that in many ways. He talked of leaving behind 99 sheep to search for the one lost sheep and return it to safety. He spoke of a father who ran to welcome his prodigal son home. And he called his disciples to fish for men and women and children who are swimming aimlessly in life. If you are a follower of Jesus and not just a

fan...if you are allowing him to transform you...then Jesus is going to plug you into his mission to save lost people.

This is the mission we are reclaiming as a church. And it's all your fault! YOU were the ones who responded to our Beyond These Walls initiative with more passion and generosity than ever. YOU TOLD US you wanted us to be more concerned about those outside our church. We listened to YOUR HEARTS...and we realized that we had become more concerned about caring for those inside our walls...and less concerned about seeking the lost. Lots of churches start out on mission with Jesus to seek the lost...and end up in maintenance mode where they are more focused on themselves than on others. This was happening to us.

That's what your elders realized about a year ago. We had lost the fire in our bellies to reach lost people. We were happy if they came and joined us... as long as it didn't require much in the way of change on our part. But we had become passive ...hoping the fish would jump into our boat...instead of doing the hard work of casting our nets to catch and draw them in. Well...we are fishing again.

So...if things feel a little different... maybe even a little scary... that might be why. We feel like we took our eye off the ball...we stopped caring as much about fishing for lost souls as Jesus cares. We were out of balance...and we are trying to get back in balance. This doesn't mean we don't care for the ones already in our boat. Part of being a family means taking care of each other. It just means that we don't MOSTLY focus on taking care of each other.

One of the ways you can join Jesus in fishing for lost souls is to understand what I'm saying... and persuade yourself that it matters. It might mean tolerating changes you don't prefer because lost people matter more than your preferences. It might mean having mercy on me and my team when we make mistakes in trying some new things to reach lost people. Just your change of your heart... of attitude ... of conversation... would be a meaningful and helpful way to become fishers of lost people. It's passive...but it's powerful. Let Jesus change your heart!

OR...you could go crazy! Sign up for Alpha next time. Come and experience what it means to share your faith with those who have no faith. Come and listen as others teach you how to talk about Jesus. I listened to a table leader this week who was BRIMMING with joy about what is going on in his Alpha group. It turns out fishing is FUN!

Follow me and I will make you become fishers of men. Jesus' definition of discipleship. So, how do you assess yourself? Are you a follower or a fan? Are you allowing Jesus to transform you...or are you pretty content with just the way you are? Are you engaged in the mission of Jesus to reach the lost...or could you honestly care less?

We are all about next steps as a church. You'll find some on this insert. If you feel like you are more of a fan than a follower, maybe you need to sign up for the next Alpha... or get baptized. If you feel stuck spiritually, maybe you need to join a LifeGroup. OR maybe CR is a way for you to tackle your anger or pride or impatience. Or maybe God is calling you to fish. Alpha training is the perfect place to gain the courage and confidence to share your faith in an authentic way.

Where are you right now...and what is ONE next step that will make you a stronger disciple of Jesus? As this song plays, I invite you to take a look at your sheet...fill it out...and turn it in at the door. We will help you take your next step in discipleship.

Follow me...and I will make you become...fishers of men!